

FREE ROAMING HORSE IMPACTS



Virginia Range, Storey County, NV

IN NEVADA AND THE AMERICAN WEST



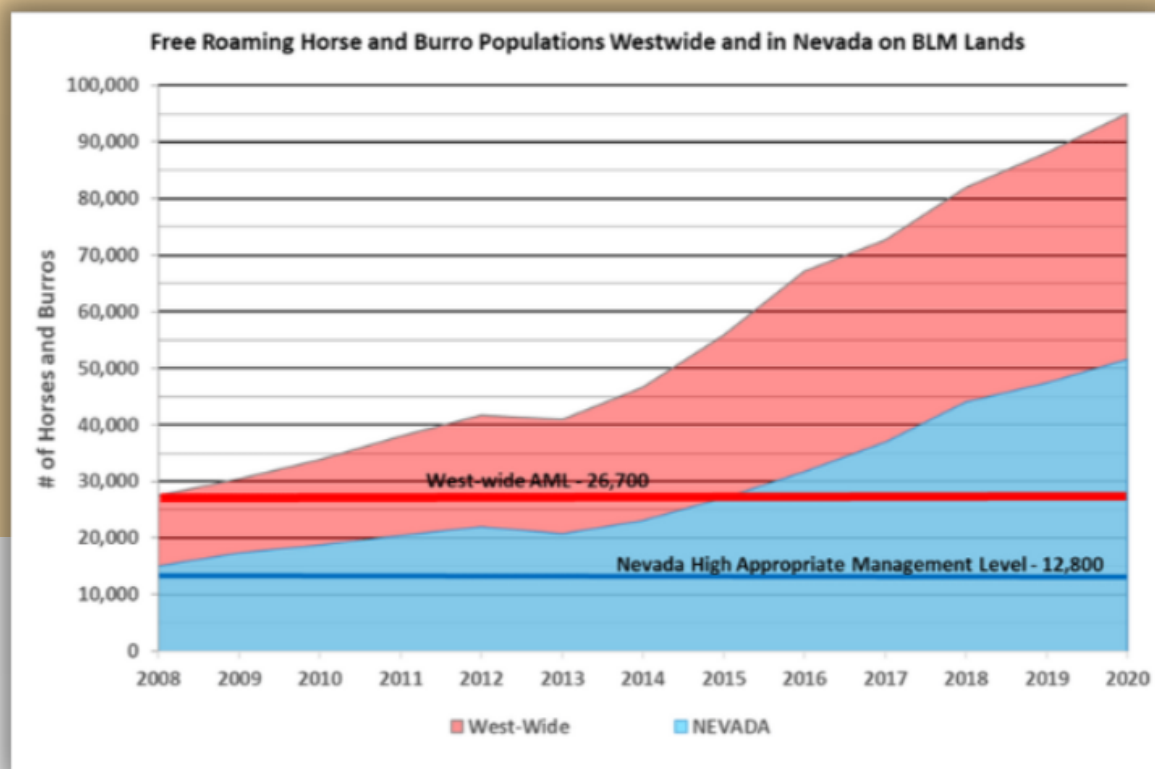
North of High Rock Canyon, near the
Washoe - Humboldt County line.



The information below, compiled by the Coalition for Healthy Nevada Lands, Wildlife, and Free Roaming Horses, is intended for policymakers and others concerned with the protection, management, and biodiversity of Nevada's public lands.

- There were approximately 100,000 horses on land managed by the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service in the 10 western states in 2020. This number is 400% of appropriate management levels (AML) of 27,000². Horse populations are becoming unmanageable because the number of new horses produced each year exceeds our ability to remove them; populations can double in 3-5 years. Even an aggressive gather program will require more than a decade to bring numbers down to AML³.
- Nevada is home to over 50% of the nation's free roaming horses, having 50,000 on BLM lands in 2020 (nearly 400% of AML)¹, and another 10,000 on state, Forest Service and military lands.
- AML is defined as the number of horses that can exist in a Herd Management Area to maintain a healthy ecological balance, to ensure healthy plant communities and wildlife populations⁴. Climate change is causing increased temperature and drought, both of which reduce productivity of forage plants on rangelands⁵ and the ability of rangelands to support horses, livestock, and native wildlife.
- Free roaming horses can substantially reduce plants and water sources required for wildlife. For example, Sage-grouse chick survival is reduced in areas used by horses where key plants have been depleted⁶. Greater Sage-grouse populations are stable when local horse populations are at or below AML but decline when horse populations are above AML⁷, indicating that AML provides reasonable goals for managers to maintain healthy rangelands.
- Less than 1% of Nevada's public lands have water⁸. Free roaming horses, above AML, degrade and dry up springs, streams and adjacent areas, upon which all species depend⁹.
- Free roaming horses deprive wildlife, including pronghorn, elk, bighorn sheep, and mule deer of access to water and the riparian habitats^{10,11,12,13,14}.
- Fertility control does not reduce populations to a sustainable level if horses are over AML^{15,16}. The necessity of recapturing mares repeatedly to administer fertility control stresses the horses, makes them harder to gather, and increases costs. Fertility control, could be a cost effective part of on-going management, along with an active adoption program, once horse populations are at AML.
- After removal, horses not adopted must be held until they die in BLM funded pastures or corrals. The majority of funds in the BLM's budget for management of horses and burros pays for holding horses after removal from public lands¹⁷. There is urgent need for public/private partnerships to fund adequate holding pastures.
- The least expensive plan, which minimizes handling of horses, is to reduce numbers on the range to AML as rapidly as possible, then maintain populations at AML. This is because horses on the range continue to produce offspring. Larger populations produce more excess animals that also reproduce; each excess horse must eventually be removed and held off range, at high cost, until they die¹⁸.
- Free roaming horses and burros are considered part of the multiple uses of public lands. Healthy horses are a highlight when seen in our high desert landscape. Timely removal improves health of horses, wildlife, and the habitat. We urge your support for an immediate long-term, well-funded plan apportioned according to free roaming horse and burro numbers in each state. This will help ensure a safe and healthy future for free roaming horses, burros, and wildlife.
- We, the American public, are responsible for the nation's wild horses and burros from birth to death and for their impact on our rangelands and wildlife.

NOTES AND REFERENCES



1. This fact sheet is focused on the consequences of the overpopulation of free roaming horses on public lands. It is not intended to diminish damage caused by poor management of livestock. There are tools available for management of livestock that reduce damage when applied.
2. https://www.blm.gov/sites/blm.gov/files/wildhorse_2020_HAHMA_Stats_508.pdf (accessed Dec. 30, 2020)
3. Population projections from the Coalition for Healthy Nevada Lands, Wild Horses and Wildlife.
4. Public Law 92-195. The wild free-roaming horses and burros Act of 1971. Washington, DC: Authenticated U.S. Government information. United States Government Printing Office; 1971.
5. Governor's report on climate change. Available at: <https://climateaction.nv.gov/our-strategy/>
6. Street, P. 2020. Dissertation, University of Nevada Reno.
7. Coates, P. Presentation to the Nevada Sagebrush Ecosystem Council, December 10, 2020.
8. Lico, M. S. 1996. Nevada Wetland Resources, pages 267 – 272 in U.S. Geological Survey Water-Supply Paper 2425.
9. Boyd, C. S., K. W. Davies, and G. H. Collins. 2017. Impacts of feral horse use on herbaceous riparian vegetation within a sagebrush steppe ecosystem. *Rangeland Ecology & Management* 70:411-417.
10. Berger, J. 1985. Interspecific interactions and dominance among wild Great Basin ungulates. *Journal of Mammalogy* 66:571-573.
11. Gooch, A. M. J, S. L. Petersen, G. H. Collins, T. S. Smith, B. R. McMillan, and D. L. Eggett. 2017. The impact of feral horses on pronghorn behavior at water sources. *Journal of Arid Environments* 138:38-43.
12. Ostermann-Kelm, S., E. R. Atwill, E. S. Rubin, M. C. Jorgensen, and W. M. Boyce. 2008. Interactions between feral horses and desert bighorn sheep at water. *Journal of Mammalogy* 89:459-466.
13. Perry, N. D., P. I Morey, and G. San Miguel. 2015. Dominance of a natural water source by feral horses. *Southwestern Naturalist* 60:390-393.
14. Hall, L. K., R. T. Larsen, M. D. Westover, C. C. Day, R. N. Knight, and B. R. McMillan. 2016. Influence of exotic horses on the use of water by communities of native wildlife in a semi-arid environment. *Journal of Arid Environments* 127:100-105.
15. Presentation by FREES Population Subcommittee to the Coalition for Healthy Nevada Lands, Wild Horses and Wildlife
16. Bureau of Land management. 2020. Report to Congress: An Analysis of Achieving a Sustainable Wild Horse and Burro Program.
17. <https://www.blm.gov/programs/wild-horse-and-burro/about-the-program/program-data>.
18. Financial estimates from Coalition for Healthy Nevada Lands, Wildlife, and Free Roaming Wild Horses.

Please click here to support SJR3

Send a clear message to our NV Congressional delegation that:

Nevadans care about the declining health of our lands, wildlife and free-roaming horses & burros.

Nevadans support immediate, effective management action to protect and restore the health of our lands, wildlife and free roaming horses & burros.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND ATTENTION TO THIS IMPORTANT MATTER. PLEASE DON'T HESITATE TO REACH OUT WITH ANY QUESTIONS.

Coalition for Healthy Nevada Lands, Wildlife and Free Roaming Horses

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